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THE ENDLESS LIFE:

TWO DISCOURSES

ON

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH OPINION ON HUMAN
DESTINY, DURING THE LAST THIRTY YEARS, WITH
A SPECIAL VIEW TO THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY
THROUGH THE DIVINE INCARNATION.

PREACHED AT ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, HAWLEY ROAD, KENTISH
TOWN, ON MARCH 19th, 1882.

BY EDWARD WHITE.

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A DISCOURSE ON THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHURCH IN HAWLEY ROAD.

The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.—1 JOHN ii, 17.

THE present week terminates the thirtieth year of the history of our Congregation and Ministry. Several reasons incline us briefly to rehearse this history to-day in the ears of a new generation, since those who were present at its commencement are rapidly passing away; and the story will, I doubt not, become interesting, perhaps encouraging, to our survivors, as a passage in English Church life in the nineteenth century..

The history of English thought on human destiny is a subject which may well lift us above all personal recollections into the infinite realms. Individual interests vanish when the rending veil exposes eternity to our view. Yet, if we are to give the history of English thought and opinion it will be necessary to state some facts, and to commemorate some English experiences, since it is through the finite that the infinite is brought into relation with man.

I shall not detain you long with the story of local endeavour in this field of English belief. The beginnings which we bring to mind to-day will soon lead us away from our own individuality into a review of greater movements, and the commemoration of the deeds of many soldiers of Christ in our own and other lands. Nevertheless, as this is our Commemoration day, we will tell the home story first of all.

A few sentences will suffice to despatch the personal part of this narrative, which yet are necessary in order to explain what will follow. Forty-four years ago, in 1838, towards the end of my educational course in preparation for the Christian ministry, I met, as we say, accidentally on a Holborn book-stall, with an anonymous volume which, as appeared by a manuscript letter inside its cover, had previously belonged to the then Bishop of Llandaff, the celebrated critic, Dr. Herbert Marsh, and had been presented to him by the author, a layman, Mr. James Fontaine, in the year 1817. It was neither a learned nor a critical book, but it clearly maintained and enforced in a devout temper the doctrine that "Immortality is dependent on spiritual regeneration, and that eternal punishment is privation, not suffering." It was published by Hatchard, bookseller to the Queen, Piccadilly. I bought it for a trifle, and it proved the turning-point in my life. I found myself both astonished and interested by the august idea which in simple language it unfolded; that man, by sin, had lost immortal life; and that the object of the stupendous procedure of the Incarnation of the Godhead in the person of Christ was to restore the divine image to man, and with it an everlasting life in God. I found it impossible to shake off the impression which it made upon me, agreeing as it did so much with the surface meaning of the Bible. But the next thought was that since this doctrine had sunk out of general knowledge, as was evident by my own surprise at hearing of it, it had failed of acceptance because it was only one of many unsuccessful heresies.

Nevertheless, I resolved to keep it in view in those systematic studies of Holy Scripture in which I was then engaged, knowing that, although it had been generally rejected, and had sunk out of view, that was a fate

which had befallen some undoubted truths in a world not much given to careful examination of evidence, and ruled in its belief by authority and by custom rather than by inquiry. Under any result, fresh examination would either confirm the idea of Mr. Fontaine's book, or would re-establish my feet upon the rock of orthodox faith. Therefore, on a night of extraordinary splendour and beauty, when the vastness of the starry heavens seemed to impart a most solemn urgency to the question of human destiny, I remember praying to the God of heaven, in a high garden on the banks of the Lower Thames, that He would lead me into the knowledge of His Truth on this matter, and strengthen me even for a life-long conflict, either to re-enforce the awful doctrine of orthodoxy on the future of humanity, or to shake its sway. I do not think any youthful spirit ever more honestly devoted itself to find out TRUTH by patient investigation, and if necessary to suffer for its diffusion, than I did on that night, when the Infinite seemed to open afresh on my view.

For seven years I pursued the inquiry, amidst other studies, reading the books of the Bible in order, over and over again, using all the aids, literary and personal, which were available.

The result was an ever-deepening conviction that Fontaine's unlearned book set forth the very truth of God,—1st, on the nature of man as not necessarily immortal; 2nd, on the result of the Fall as bringing man under sentence of death, in the sense of extinction of all life; 3rd, on the object of Redemption to renew man in the divine image, in the possession of an endless life through union with the Incarnate life of God in Christ; while it resulted, also, 4th, that man out of Christ will utterly perish and die the "second death" in hell, without hope of recovery.

I had pretty early discovered that these ideas had a very ancient history; that they were distinctly held and taught by some of the most important of the writers of the second and third centuries; and had been, in whole or in part, revived by a long succession of writers in subsequent ages,—most of whom, however, had treated the question erroneously, chiefly as one of future punishment, instead of regarding it as a question on the nature and objects of the Christian redemption.

Accordingly, after laying the critical and historical evidence which had carried my own judgment before several able friends, who were similarly affected by it, notably before John Foster the essayist, who responded in the celebrated letter published in his memoirs, I published a pamphlet without my name in 1844, entitled *What was the Fall?*—thus showing that the object was not to affront Christendom by a juvenile or dogmatic denial of its settled beliefs, but to obtain a much-needed thorough discussion of a neglected topic in theology. This pamphlet obtained no success, except a scurrilous and contemptuous notice in the *Evangelical Magazine*.

It was now necessary to set forth the argument in greater fulness. Accordingly, in 1846, the first edition of *Life in Christ* was published in a small octavo volume, which was received, along with Mr. Dobney's work published in the same year, without any serious examination, and with a storm of indignation against us, which plainly showed that my own prospect of further employment in the Congregational Ministry was ended. It is difficult to convey to this generation a conception of the vehemence and severity of the condemnation with which these early efforts of ours were met by the English religious public.

The practical result for myself was exclusion from every Nonconformist pulpit in the land; and I could not conscien-

tiously enter the National Church. One mode alone of continuing in the Ministry remained available—to go to London, as the centre of English thought, and to obtain if possible some church-building where there might be a legal right to preach the Gospel under such conditions as I have described, where these conclusions might be tested and thoroughly sifted amidst the culture and experience of London Christianity.

This building, in its original form, in a somewhat obscure suburb, was the only one that offered. We were not acquainted with a single Christian person in the neighbourhood who would be likely to render assistance. But I committed the cause to God alone, and went forward. No prospect could have seemed more unpromising. We were then alone in London in these beliefs. Devout men, held in deserved honour, went about warning all who “valued their immortal souls” not to cross this threshold. For my part I was not sorry for these disadvantages. The movement had begun in incessant prayer for light on this awful problem of man’s nature and destiny, in ceaseless study of the sacred Scriptures, and in a willingness to suffer anything in disrepute and loss of promotion, God enabling us, in order to test the truth, and to promulgate it if confirmed. If these ideas were errors, we said, let them be crushed—the sooner the better—by all the weight of public authority and of hostile learned opinion; or let them be smothered by this local obscurity, insignificance, and financial difficulty. On the other hand, we said, if these ideas are true and divine, “ye cannot overthrow them.” If some few people are found ready to suffer sharply enough, and long enough, in bringing them before the public, they will certainly make way at last; God will fight for them if they are His truth, and will strengthen us, or some one else, to continue the witness, and will supply the needful resources.

And if "these things are so," He will in time open the eyes of some of His abler servants to see what we, and so many others before us, have seen, and strengthen them to acknowledge the doctrine of Life in Christ as true in itself, and true for the times.

No sooner was the building opened for worship than some signs of sympathy appeared. Several distinguished ministers, guarding themselves against the supposition of agreeing with us, preached at this re-consecration. A few friendly and heroic souls from a distance, whose hearts God had touched, cast in their lot with us at the very commencement, nearly all previously unknown. These have mostly passed away; a few remain still to enjoy the recollection of their remarkable self-denial and courage, and to join their thanksgiving with ours to-day in the review of the years that have gone by.

There was this speciality in the establishment of this congregation, that it was founded in 1852 to do a double work. First, it was founded to fulfil the ordinary function of a congregational society, to "gather out" of the surrounding population, by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, "a people for God's name," who by joint worship and work might become the instruments of the Holy Spirit for saving other souls, and for helping forward the general mission of the Gospel through the world. This was the chief end proposed in our church foundation, and I thank God that this has been our chief end ever since. No one who has joined us has ever been asked what was his opinion or belief on any secondary subject; the only condition of church-membership has been declared faith in Christ, and in the dogmatic authority of His Apostles, and a consistent life. We have been glad to welcome the adhesion of persons who agreed with us in important secondary views, but such agreement

was not essential, and as a matter of fact only a fractional section of our society has exhibited a strong theological tendency in any direction. It has been this practical spirit of the church for thirty years which has been its salvation in every sense of the word, for no church can subsist wholly or chiefly upon controversy, even on matters of the gravest importance. It is the chief comfort of my own reflections to-day that there never was more uncontroversial zeal for the common salvation, never more zeal for the salvation of souls, never more good work done amongst us for young men and women, for the ignorant, for the poor, for the rich, for the surrounding population, for the heathen nations, than at the present time.

There was, however, a second end to accomplish—and a difficult one—namely, to combine with the ordinary course of evangelisation and church-fellowship here, a public effort to explain, to defend, and to propagate those doctrines on immortal life, which long previous study had led us to regard as worthy of all acceptance. It was a sufficiently entangled undertaking. There was always the danger of giving undue prominence to these specialities; of which those who disliked them would not be slow to make observation. There was the opposite danger of so concealing them that one chief object of the movement would be sacrificed to the aim of pleasing its adversaries. We have tried to avoid both extremes.

Whether all that has grown up here and elsewhere throughout the world from these beginnings is to be traced to the good hand of God upon us, or to the aid of the power of darkness assisting a small number of men for thirty years, at great personal loss and discomfort, to enforce and propagate a pernicious heresy, you can judge at your leisure. For my own part I end these thirty years as I began them by calling

God to record that we have been actuated, so far as we know, by no spirit of rebellion against His holy revelations, but by an honest desire to interpret the Bible according to the plain rule of taking its meaning from the most obvious sense of its general expressions, as on all other topics, so on this subject of Life and Death eternal. And at the end of this long period of additional study of God's word, of conference with an immense number of scholars of all churches, and of several nations, of laborious investigation of the ancient and modern literature of the questions concerned (having hereby obtained an acquaintance with the controversy which gives one a certain moderate claim to be listened to, superior at least to that of hasty and trifling notice-writers in religious newspapers and magazines); above all at the end of these thirty years' experience of the spiritual effects seen in Christians subjected to such teaching, and in alienated souls both ignorant and educated, who have been reclaimed by its influence, I solemnly this day confess again the doctrine which was taught here at first, that man is not represented in the divine revelation as immortal since the fall, but as a being who has lost the hope of everlasting life, which he can regain only by spiritual regeneration and union with the immortal Son of God. And, therefore, I protest again, with all my heart and soul and mind, against what appear to us still those two opposite errors, both springing from the common root of faith in man's natural immortality; first, against the doctrine of endless torments to be inflicted in hell on unsaved men, whether civilised or barbarian; and, secondly, against the now popular doctrine of the absolute final salvation of all men, good and bad; as directly contrary both to the letter and spirit of the Christian revelation recorded in Holy Scripture.

I now wish to add a few observations on the general history of the discussions of the past thirty years on the momentous subjects to which reference has been made :—

I. Let it be noted specially, and everywhere diligently declared, that the object set before them, whether here or elsewhere, by those who agree with us, has not been, as is too commonly represented, primarily to promulgate a doctrine on the future punishment of wicked men, but a doctrine on the salvation of good men—a doctrine on the means and conditions of everlasting life for those who are saved ; not primarily the doctrine of the everlasting destruction of the wicked, much less a metaphysical refinement on their “annihilation” (a term which we have never employed, because it hopelessly entangles the real question with side-issues, and opens the door to metaphysical quibbles on the abolition of substance). We have taught, as Scripture teaches, that the wicked will *perish*, and we can discern no reason why this word should not signify the same thing in their case that it does when it is used to describe the “perishing” of bread, or of wine-skins, or of the heavens, in John vi., Luke vi., and Psalm cii. ; that is, the “bread” and the “heavens,” and the wine-skins, will be no more in that character. Christ says the wicked will be “*killed with death*,” be “*destroyed body and soul in Gehenna*,” and it is to follow the universal law of interpretation when we say that this does not signify any form of living for ever. But this is only secondary truth. The main point is that the gift of **ENDLESS LIFE** in God’s image is the central idea of revelation—the idea whence radiate all other evangelical truths on justification, sanctification, and resurrection ; and this life for “perishing sinners” is in Christ alone, the Incarnate Life of God. Deathless life, or immortality, is not the property of the animal man, but only of the spiritual. “The world passeth

away, and the lust thereof; but *he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*"—1 John ii, 17.

II. I desire to-day to offer a distinct answer to the question so often publicly, so much more often privately, proposed, "How is it, if this doctrine be true, and, according to its advocates, so easily to be seen to be true by careful inquirers, that such numbers of ministers of religion, whose piety, ability, knowledge, and usefulness you will be the first to acknowledge, do not perceive the force of your argument, but still apparently give the weight of their authority to the established doctrines"—i., that man is naturally immortal in his soul; ii., that Christ does not confer immortality of the soul on believers, but only holiness, and blessedness, because they are already immortal; iii., that God will inflict misery on the wicked for ever, because they, too, are by nature immortal? Why is this? Why has not this argument for Life in Christ affected these good and able men all over the world?"

To this question we reply—i. That, as a matter of fact, which we have learned by extensive inquiry, the tone and method of preaching on these subjects is greatly modified both in England and America. I believe that men are now seldom *pressed* as they used to be with the notion of their own natural and necessary immortality, except by Universalists. Very widely, preachers have come back to the model of the Apostles, who never rest anything on man's natural immortality, in either body or soul. No public or formal confession is made of change of opinion, but practically the language of the orthodox preachers who have grown up during the last thirty years is far more in accord with Scripture than was the language of their predecessors. Very much more attention is paid everywhere to the doctrine of Life in Christ, which, whatever it may signify, holds the central place in the New Testament.

2. Similar careful inquiry satisfies us that the whole tenor of language used in the pulpit on future punishment has undergone a great modification in nearly all Churches. Thirty years ago scarcely a sermon was preached without some phrase indicating the belief that unsaved persons, whether in Christendom or Heathendom, being immortal, would "*suffer for ever*," would go to "*endless woe*," or "*endless misery*," or be "*banished from the presence of God in eternal remorse*." I believe that such unscriptural expressions are now more rarely employed ; the terms used in Scripture are employed instead, and left to produce their own effect on the minds of the hearers, without further commentary. These ordinary ministers have all heard that much more eminent Greek and Hebrew scholars than they themselves can ever hope to be, and quite equal to any on the side of traditional opinion, strongly affirm that there is no philological or psychological reason why the terms of Scripture should not be taken in their obvious sense, and naturally this has weighed with the younger men.

3. In the next place, to my certain knowledge, among the numerous ministers supposed to adhere to the old doctrine there are not a few who feel no vocation to involve themselves with the more ignorant and passionate members of their congregations, who yet distinctly acknowledge the immense modification of nearly all men's thoughts since these questions were raised at the beginning of this generation. For example : at the autumnal meeting of the Congregational Meeting in 1881, Mr. Griffith John, of Hankow in China, a notable and noble missionary, who on his previous visit to England, ten years ago, maintained, at Exeter Hall, something much like the doctrine of endless misery as the basis of mission work, now as openly argued at Manchester, for the toleration of the three distinct theories of human destiny,—everlasting misery, con-

ditional immortality, and universal restoration, in the mission field. For myself I repudiate this loose proposal, believing that truth is one, and that only truth ought to be taught. But it is easy to see that if such is the movement of the mind among missionaries, it is much the same with ministers at home. Numbers of them are in an unsettled state of opinion, or are too busy with Church controversy to study the matter of human destiny carefully from end to end. They have forsaken their old anchorages, and are drifting they know not whither. Meantime they do not commit themselves to any definite dogma, but denounce "dogmatism," as if it were a reproach to hold a definite belief, or a belief more definite than theirs.

You will have observed that during the last thirty years not one of our honoured neighbours in the ministry within the radius of a mile, whether Episcopalian or Nonconformist, has thought it necessary to oppose openly, in a controversial form, what has been taught here. If the preachers now were exactly where most men were formerly, some of these faithful men would certainly have done this. Had we denied here the Deity of Christ, or the Atonement, and diligently circulated the denial, they would, one and all, have openly remonstrated with us, and testified against us in distinct courses of sermons. But the doctrine of man's utter death by the law for sin, and of Life in Christ, was too much like the natural sense of the whole Bible for them to do so.

No one need therefore be afraid of this doctrine, simply because comparatively few Christian ministers openly declare in a controversial form in its favour. The English rule of declaration of beliefs is, first to avow them secretly, and then publicly, after the laity is somewhat prepared for them; and, I must say, wisely, for it is in the power of one fanatical and

ignorant man or woman, in any church, to frighten the whole congregation respecting their pastor's orthodoxy ; and the more ignorant they are the more obstinate and unscrupulous.

4. Let us further demand of our honoured neighbours and friends who hold any special faith as scriptural, as the result of careful study, whether the circumstance of the *silence* of other ministers is regarded *by them* as a valid argument against such special beliefs ? Do the *Baptists* consider the silent refusal of all the Pædobaptist ministers in England to answer their arguments, or to be affected by them, as any reason for distrusting their own convictions ? Do they not at once say, in effect,—“The Independent, Methodist, and Episcopal ministers were on this topic of baptism ill-taught ; they are bound together by denominational ties ; they have not very carefully studied this question.” And do not the Independent ministers and college tutors say the very same thing of the *Baptists* ?

Again, the belief in *the Advent of Christ* at the end of “the times of the Gentiles,” to destroy Antichrist, and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth for a thousand years, is now widely spread among Christian people, excepting the Independents and Baptists, who, almost to a man, repudiate it, —although nearly all their forefathers held it in the ages of Puritanism. If you are one of the great company of those who hold this “blessed hope,” and “love the appearing of the Lord,” as an Apostolic Christian ought to do, does the general contempt of the dissenting ministers of England for “Pre-millennial views” in the least degree shake your faith in that which Bishop Lightfoot demonstrates to have been the primitive faith of Christendom, and which such men as Auberlen, Steir, Alford, and a thousand others, hold to be the plain doctrine, not only of St. Paul in the Second Epistle

to the Thessalonians, but everywhere else the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments ?

We conclude then, that the still general abstinence from any open and dogmatic confession of adhesion to the doctrine of Life in Christ by the generality of Christian ministers, is not of so much weight as it might at first appear to be.

5. Especially since, in the last place, men of the greatest calibre as to knowledge and ability, and of equal weight as to Christian character and devotedness, are at length boldly avowing their adhesion to the truth, so long almost hopelessly proclaimed at an earlier date.

It would be easy to read a long catalogue of names of scholars and divines of every rank, and of almost every country ; theologians, linguists, critics, philosophers, missionaries, who, having carefully studied these disputed doctrines on human nature and destiny, now openly and earnestly avow the conviction of their truth.

But I will take as an example the names of four distinguished men only, known to all by reputation, who have recently, in various ways, declared their assent. Professor Stokes, Mr. Dale, Mr. Thomas Walker, and Mr. Skrefsrüd, of the Santhal Mission in India. These four eminent persons divide between them nearly all the graver intellectual and literary accomplishments of our time ; and they are all devout and earnest Christians—spiritual, and not simply formally religious men. Professor Stokes, Secretary to the Royal Society, and Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge, brings to bear on the study of Scripture, a mind which is the finest result of University culture in habits of calm and exact thought. Mr. Dale is sufficiently well known as an accomplished and well-balanced theologian, all whose tendencies lie in the direction of evangelical orthodoxy. Mr.

Thomas Walker, formerly editor of the *Daily News*, adds to a large acquaintance with European literature, and a habit of Biblical study, an intimate knowledge of the unbelieving world, and the causes of their alienation; which he has set forth in his recent critique on Mr. Tennyson's poem on *Despair*.* Mr. Skrefsrød stands in the front rank of Indian philologists, and is now employed by the Indian Government in writing a Comparative Grammar in seventeen languages: so that he knows more than most men the force and signification of Asiatic words. He is also, as you know, one of the most devoted and successful missionaries now living. These four distinguished men, with no leaning whatever towards heresy, after the most careful study of the questions concerned, and knowing all the critical devices by which the argument for Life in Christ is usually met and entangled in the popular religious magazines, have all recently declared their clear and firm assent to the doctrine that the hope of human immortality is in Christ alone, and that this hope is restricted to men who are "born again" of the Spirit.

Now, as I have mentioned names on one side, I will mention one honoured name on the other. No one yields to me in hearty admiration and affection for the Rev. Charles Spurgeon. But his refusal to listen to the doctrine of Life in Christ has formed a more serious obstacle to its popular diffusion than that of any other living man during the last twenty years. Now, the interests of truth (not my own inclination) compel me to ask whether the decided judgment and belief of four such scholars and thinkers as I have just mentioned, men who have carefully studied this matter, ought not, if opinions are to be influenced by authority, to outweigh,

a hundred times, the opposition of even the most popular preacher on earth; from whom we have never once been able to extract a deliberate and reasoned statement in reply to this positive and cumulative argument; but who simply persists in repeating, year after year, that *life* in the Bible, does not signify life, but something else; and that *death* signifies separation from God in a state of sin and misery for ever. Frankly, I regard the deliberate judgment of four such modern inquirers, and of Irenæus (A.D. 160) as of much greater weight than that of Mr. Spurgeon.

III. I shall conclude this discourse by a few observations on the reputed, and actual, results which have attended the diffusion of the doctrine of Immortality through Christ only during the past generation.

1. The notion has prevailed in some quarters that two evils attend this teaching:—

(1.) It has been said that the denial of man's natural immortality leads to popular materialism, and to the most debasing views of human nature; and (2) it is said that the removal of the belief in endless torment in hell leads to the extinction of religious fear, and therefore removes the chief restraint on the wickedness of ungodly men.

Here let me acknowledge at once that I have never seen much practical good to result when this question is taken up merely as a modification of doctrine on future retribution—merely as a relief from the unspeakable horrors of the old Papistic Roman doctrine on endless torments. Men who take up the doctrine simply as a negative dogma on future punishment are brought no nearer to Christ by the alteration of their views. It is only when this reformation of doctrine is closely connected with the person of Christ that the spiritual benefit

of the change appears. It is because some of its defenders have been mere destructionists, merely interested in a doctrine on judgment, that they have so easily yielded to the sinister allurements of Universalism. Vital union with Christ by the indwelling Spirit of Life, this must be our watchword. Out of Christ, no life eternal—only a wretched and terminable life here,—and beyond only the second death—death eternal,—in Christ, the power of an endless life, and this life everlasting holiness and love. This doctrine so taught establishes a close life-relation with the risen Saviour, which is also a love-relation, at once the solid basis of hope and the chief means of contending against temptation. The two Sacraments then receive a flood of light from these ideas. Baptism is seen to be the burial of the corrupt humanity with Christ—“the baptism of repentance *for the remission of sins*”—the symbol, too, of resurrection to the new life in the risen Saviour. This interpretation lifts Baptism to a lofty height above its modern sectarian associations. In like manner the Lord’s Supper sets forth the Sacrificial Covenant of Life, under which we eat “the bread which came down from heaven to give life unto the world,” and drink “the blood which is the life” of the Life-giver.

We have not found the result of such teaching to be the spread of degrading views of human nature in this place. No true views of human nature can be degrading views. The true elevation of man does not depend on adopting a style of rhetorical exaggeration, or in describing him, with Dr. Winter Hamilton, as naturally a “coeval of God,” as naturally an immortal being, that is, *incapable of death*. Had such statements been true they would have occurred everywhere in the revelation of God. But they occur nowhere in the Bible. Men are never once addressed in the Scriptures as

immortal or deathless beings. The wicked man is born, but he *shall surely die*. The elevation of man is always traced in the Bible to his moral nature, to his original relation to God, to his original destiny to eternal life, to his capacity for now receiving the life-giving remedy of redemption. All this remains to us in full force: with the additional impulse which comes with believing that the lowest and most sunken savage on earth may, through this redemption, be raised to share in the Glory of the everlasting Son of God.

Neither have we found that the result of this teaching has been, as is alleged, to extinguish in man that fear of judgment to come, at the thought of which "Felix trembled."

On the contrary, the experience of all who have tried the experiment is that the firm adoption of the doctrine of judgment to come, as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles, is to awaken for the first time a salutary fear of that judgment in multitudes who never feared it under the old form of teaching it, and thereby to prepare them to "flee for refuge" from hell and death to Christ the Lord and Giver of Life.

The strongest language which I could employ to-day in representing this favourable result, not only in my own experience, but in that of a vast number of Christian believers in all lands, must fall short of the facts.

The fewest and simplest words will best convey our meaning. So far is it from being true that the doctrine of everlasting torment has upheld the fear of God's judgment in the minds and consciences of mankind, that the opposite statement is nearer the truth. No single indirect influence has done so much to promote European infidelity, no single influence has indirectly done so much to root out the very belief of God from the minds of the European nations—as

that doctrine of a torment that shall never, never end—that notion of eternal evil resulting from the anti-Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The common people, and the educated people of Europe, generally speaking, literally hate the very idea of the God of orthodoxy ; and all their literature, high and low, will tell you why. It is the result of what they regard as the unjust, and therefore incredible, doctrine taught for so many ages by that church which permits none of its ministers to be either a husband or a father—the doctrine of the endless torment of the unsaved members of a race born in sin, brought up in ignorance, sorely tempted, and despotically ruled by priests and kings. The very first principle of that terrible Russian Nihilism, as taught by its chief apostle, as he says, is “to get rid of the very idea of God as the root of all evil—a God who is capable of tormenting mankind for ever and ever.” This doctrine has simply exploded popular faith in Christianity throughout Europe. No religion offers any support to morality unless the God whom it makes known is a moral being, whose attributes commend themselves to the unsophisticated conscience. No unsophisticated human conscience accepts the idea of the God who, creating men immortal, predestinates some to eternal bliss, and condemns the non-elect to endless misery. Such a creed produces everywhere, sooner or later, popular atheism.

The doctrine of Life in Christ operates universally in favour of the belief in a just, a merciful, and intelligible Deity. It revives popular faith wherever it is boldly proclaimed in a godly sort. I firmly assert that it has acted thus in this quarter of London. Is it not notoriously true that so far from removing the fear of judgment to come, future punishment has been here set forth in a way which makes it appear just as real and as credible as future blessedness ? And has not

the effect been largely to draw the teeth of infidelity and atheism in this neighbourhood? Where are the raging infidels and atheists of this locality? Are they found among the people of the factories, who are never weary of telling us how grateful they are for being enabled to recover their hold on Christianity, through these representations of it? No! Neither here, nor at Birmingham with Mr. Dale, nor in Liverpool with Mr. Stowell Brown, nor in any town visited by Mr. Aitken, who is observed now never to teach man's natural immortality, nor in Brussels, nor Geneva, nor in the United States, is any result found except one—that heaven and hell, the two issues of human life, become for the first time credible to multitudes—and men fear judgment to come more because they can *believe* it more. No man's conduct is practically governed by that which his judgment and conscience pronounce to be incredible. And the doctrine of endless torment, as applied to the masses of mankind, seemed just as incredible to John Foster as it does to Paul Bert or Charles Bradlaugh. Now, what we assert is that the orthodox church-Christianity is indirectly guilty of assisting into atheism these horrible blasphemers.

Next, the effect of this teaching among Scientific Men has corresponded with its results among the multitude. I speak with great humility of scientific men, but I say that which I know to be the truth, when I affirm that the doctrine of Life in Christ is now preventing numbers of scientific and professional people from joining the ranks of infidelity and atheism; and is holding them fast in the faith of Christianity. Not a few of these have with warm acknowledgment assured us that the pathway to faith has been made clear by the doctrine of Immortal Life through the Incarnation; and it is

a doctrine which is spreading among religiously-disposed scientific men of all ranks every day. It corresponds with the honest conclusions of real science, physical and metaphysical, and affords that solid hope of immortality which nature does not afford. It throws a marvellous light upon the meaning of the Divine Incarnation, and on the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, so converting the great stumbling-block to faith into its strongest attraction. It will be, I feel persuaded, when better understood, the scientific and spiritual death-blow to Unitarianism, by rendering a rational account of the Incarnation. It will gather high and low around the cross and tomb of Christ, with St. Peter's confession, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Lastly, I rejoice this day to think that the labour expended here and elsewhere, by so many fellow workers, the story of whose toils and sacrifices I will recount this evening, has assisted in an immense and general modification of the teaching given to young Children, in families, schools, and churches, respecting the character of Almighty God.

At the beginning of this long siege against the fortress of ancient error the plight of children as to their instruction in the ways of God was pitiable indeed. Practically, little was said in detail, or by way of application to individuals, of the theory then prevailing in the ministry. But thoughtful children knew very well what doctrines underlay the surface-teaching in families, schools, and churches. It was this,—that they were all born immortal beings, born with souls that must live for ever, in happiness or in torment; and born with souls so degenerate and prone to sin that there was no escape from the doom of fire in hell for ever, except by regeneration either by

baptism, or, without baptism, by truth. Arminians, such as the Methodists, taught their children that *all* might escape this doom by faith and repentance. Calvinists (and the Independents and Baptists were mostly Calvinists then) taught their children that only a certain number of them born could be saved, because only a certain number were predestinated by God to be saved; all the rest born in sin, and not elected from eternity to salvation, must suffer torment in hell throughout the eternity to come. This was the creed, taught in a quiet and respectable way, under which I was myself educated among the Independents. It was not worked out in detail by the pious preacher, the younger and more thoughtful hearers were left to work it out in their own reflections.

Mr. Robert Browning, then a boy with marvellous countenance and black and flashing eyes, listened to this doctrine in the corner of the gallery, close to the reverend preacher's right hand, and I listened to it in the same church, on the floor. What effect it had on Mr. Robert Browning I can only guess from his poems. For myself, it nearly drove me mad with secret misery of mind, in thinking of such a God. Our young souls were enmeshed in the most perplexing tangle of contradictory ideas. We were taught that God was good and just; all the Bible and all the hymns said that, and Nature confirmed the lesson. But, what could we make of this Omnipotent Being, who "*so* loved the world" as to determine on the birth of an immense multitude of non-elect children—who must suffer for ever—while we ourselves might be amongst the fated number. Well, it did not quite make infidels of us, for better influences were at work, but it did so very nearly. It poisoned the fountains of youthful joy, and rendered it the most dreadful task on earth to think steadily

of our Creator. From fourteen years old and upwards our faith depended very much on the art of not thinking on the hateful mystery.

Such was the youth out of which sprang my own subsequent history ; and to-day I praise, and extol, and honour the King of Heaven, who has shaken this old and frightful system of theology almost to the ground, and is strengthening a great company to protest, year after year, against such teaching of the young ; until at length, this year, even the Methodist Conference has silently withdrawn its ancient catechism of horrors, for not teaching which they three years ago expelled Mr. Impey, forty years missionary in South Africa.

Throughout England children to-day are taught the true character of God as never before. Few teachers dare to repeat to them the mediæval tales of dread under which our own earlier years were so deeply oppressed. Even Mr. Moody, in his recent Edinburgh addresses to the young, never once told any of them the old Church of Scotland story,—that they were liable, through the sin of Adam, to endless misery.

The God of Abraham bless the lads and lasses, and draw them nearer to Himself under the blessed sunlight of happier truth which has dawned upon them now !

DISCOURSE II.

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH OPINION ON HUMAN DESTINY
DURING THE LAST THIRTY YEARS; WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY
THROUGH THE DIVINE INCARNATION.

“If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”—ROM. viii., 13..

In the discourse of this morning I related the history of the foundation of this church, explaining the doctrine for which, among other objects, liberty of utterance in London was here first obtained, and some of the changes in English opinion on human destiny, which we have lived to witness and rejoice in.

This evening we shall extend our view over a far wider horizon, and attempt to commemorate at once the mercies of God, and the honour of those of his servants who have assisted in effecting the changes of belief to which reference has been made.

The example of Holy Scripture, and the custom of nearly all churches, warrants such an occasional commemoration of public service on the day of rest; and it happens that scarcely any person is more qualified than myself, by age and by personal knowledge of the actors in this matter, to record their “good deeds towards the house of their God.” Most of them have suffered for years for their convictions, and borne their testimony amidst every kind of social discouragement. It shall at least not be our fault to-day if their courage and patience fail of a loving memorial.

But first of all let us clearly admonish the Christian public, that none of us who have been concerned in these latest

endeavours to revive and diffuse a psychology which compels a reformed interpretation of Scripture, have thought of ourselves for one moment as discoverers of a secret not before made known to Christendom. The common charge, preferred against us by many, that we are inviting the world to believe that until some of us arose no one had previously understood the Christian religion, may serve the purpose of theological controversy, often as unjust as political strife ; but it is a misconception, founded on want of knowledge. That which we are inviting the world to believe is a simple matter of fact, which any educated reader can verify for himself ;—that in the first three centuries of Christianity the doctrine of man's natural mortality in body and soul, and of Life in Christ only, as we now teach it, is found clearly in the pages of the earliest of the Christian fathers ; and specially in the pages of Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, in the middle of the second century, separated from St. John by the one life and common bond of St. Polycarp ; and that Irenæus and others of that earliest age, explain the language of the New Testament on Immortality by Christ, precisely as we have explained it.

So that we do not set ourselves forth as discoverers, but only as revivers of forgotten truth ;—truth which had been for a time forgotten in England when we began this revival, but which in no generation since the Apostles has lacked witnesses, emphatically in the ages since the Reformation.

We have only revived the doctrine of *Irenæus* expounding St. John, when St. John had been dead scarcely sixty years :—

“ For life is not from us ourselves, or from our nature, but it is given or bestowed according to the Grace of God ; therefore he who preserves this gift of life and returns thanks to Him who bestows it, he shall receive ‘ length of days,’ for ever and ever. But he who rejects it, and proves unthankful to his Maker for creating him, and will not know Him who

bestows it, he deprives himself of the gift of duration to all eternity. And, therefore, the Lord speaks thus of such unthankful persons. If you have not been 'faithful in that which is least, who will commit much to you?' intimating thereby unto us, that they who are unthankful to Him with respect to this short transitory life which is His gift—the effect of His bounty—shall be most justly deprived of length of days for ever and ever."

"But again, those who assert that he was simply a mere man, remaining in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death; having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty through the Son, as He does Himself declare; 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' But being ignorant of Him who born of the Virgin is Emmanuel, they are deprived of His gift which is eternal life; and not receiving the incorruptible Word, they remain in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death, not obtaining the antidote of life. To whom the Word says, mentioning His own gift of grace, 'I said ye are all the sons of the Highest, and gods; but ye shall die like men.' He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation and pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the Son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?"—*Irenaeus against Heresies, Books II, III.*

We have only revived the doctrine of *Arnobius* in A.D. 260.

"For souls are of a middle or intermediate quality, as has been learned from Christ's teaching, and they are such that they may on the one hand perish, if they have not known God, and on the other hand be delivered from death, if they have given heed to his threatenings and proffered favours. That is the true death which leaves no residuum."

We have only revived the doctrine of *St. Athanasius* in his treatise on the Incarnation of the Word, A.D. 363.

“Thus God made man, and desired him to continue in incorruption. But men, making light of and rebelling against the knowledge of God, thinking out and inventing evil for themselves, came under the before-threatened condemnation of death. . . . It was right that men, being emptied of the knowledge of God, and turning to the things that are not (for evil things are things that are not, but good things really are, since they proceed from the really existing God), should be emptied also of eternal existence, and this is for them, being dissolved, to remain in death and destruction.”

We have only revived the doctrine of *Sophronius*, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in a synodical letter read to the Council of Constantinople in 680, who, after confessing all the rest of the orthodox faith, declares the true faith also to be that men’s souls have not a natural immortality. “It is the gift of God that they receive the grant of immortality and incorruptibility.”

We have only revived the doctrine of *Luther*, who said that the “immortality of the soul was one of the monstrous opinions accumulated on the Papal dung-hill.” (Opp. II., Wittemberg, folio 113).

We have only revived the doctrine of *John Locke*, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* and in his *Commentary on St Paul’s Epistles*, when he says:—

“By death threatened to Adam, some men understand endless torments in hell-fire; but it seems a strange way of understanding a law which requires the plainest and directest words, that by death should be meant eternal life in misery. Can any one be supposed to intend by a law which says, ‘*For felony thou shalt surely die*,’ not that he should lose his life, but be kept alive in exquisite and perpetual torments; and would any one think himself fairly dealt with that was so used?”

We have only revived the doctrine of a multitude of

learned members of the Church of England in the beginning of the last century, and specially of Mr. Pitts, who published a most erudite treatise in 1708, called *The Holy Spirit the Author of Immortality, or Immortality a Peculiar Grace of the Gospel, no natural ingredient of the Soul, wherein it is solidly proved that Mr. Clark hath not one sentence of the Fathers or one text of Scripture on the side of Man's Natural Immortality*; a book which accomplishes all Mr. Pitts here promises, in relation both to Scripture and to the Fathers.

We have only revived what *Dr. Watts* taught when he said in his *Ruin and Recovery of Mankind* :—

“ Who can say whether the word death might not be fairly construed to extend to the utter destruction of the life of the soul, as well as of the body? For man by sin had forfeited all that God had given him—that is, the life and existence of his soul, as well as of his body. . . . There is not one place of Scripture that occurs to me where the word death, as it was first threatened in the law of innocence, necessarily signifies a certain miserable immortality of the soul, either to Adam, the actual sinner, or to his posterity.”

We have only revived what *Archbishop Whately* taught when he said in his lectures on the “ Future State ” (p. 231), published in 1822 :—

“ ‘ Life,’ as applied to the condition of the blest, is usually understood to mean a ‘ happy life.’ And that theirs will be a happy life, we are indeed plainly taught; but I do not think we are anywhere taught that the word ‘ life’ does of itself necessarily imply happiness. If so, indeed, it would be a mere tautology to speak of a ‘ happy life;’ and a contradiction to speak of a ‘ miserable life;’ which we know is not the case, according to the usage of any language. In all ages and countries, ‘ life’ has always been applied in ordinary discourse to a wretched life no less properly than to a happy one. If, therefore, we suppose the hearers of Jesus and His apostles to have understood, as nearly as possible, the words employed in their ordinary sense, *they must naturally have conceived them to mean* (if they were taught nothing to the contrary), *that the condemned were really and literally to be ‘ destroyed’*

and cease to exist; not that they were to continue for ever to exist in a state of wretchedness."

No wonder, then, that this doctrine of Life only in the Son of God has never lacked defenders; and that when the truth has not run in the main channel it has nevertheless always run in scattered and solitary streams, as Protestantism did for one thousand years under the Papacy. The tradition has never quite died out, but has been handed from one to another, although never till our time has a sufficiently resolute attempt been made to attack the fortress of psychological error on the nature of man. Thus it was that good Mr. Fontaine, of Holborn, published the truth again in his plain English book in 1817, and seventeen years later (in 1835) the Rev. Mr. De Burgh, of Dublin, in his tract on *Eternal Life*, and four years later Mr. Storrs, of New York, an able but not lettered man, who has done good service in America.

My own public activity in this revival commenced, as I have described, in 1844 (six years after accidentally lighting on Mr. Fontaine's book in 1838) by the circulation of a pamphlet entitled *What was the Fall?*—followed, in 1845, by an octavo volume called *Life in Christ, or Immortality the peculiar privilege of Regenerate Men*. In the very same two years the Rev. H. H. Dobney, of Maidstone, published, in two forms, his excellent work on *Future Punishment*, which no one has yet answered, and which, I think, cannot be fairly answered, even by himself, if we are to be guided by the ordinary principles of interpretation.

Our two books, and our two selves, were attacked in the religious periodicals of this day, with a vehemence and contempt which perhaps betrayed some suspicion of weakness in the assailants. But the good men who wrote against us, and stirred up a popular indignation which resulted in a

prolonged excommunication, are now long laid to rest, and we will say nothing of their past behaviour. Nothing except that that noble man, and true friend of the people, Mr. Henry Dunn, Secretary of the British and Foreign School Society, himself a firm believer in Immortality through Christ, undertook our defence as young men against the calumnious attack of the *Eclectic Review*, and showed to the Nonconformist public how unfairly we had been charged with hostility to the Evangelical system.

For seven years these books, although working beneath the surface, made but one prominent convert to the revived faith of early Christianity. This was Sir James Stephen, then Professor of History at Cambridge, where, as he once told me, he always kept some copies in circulation. In the *Epilogue* to his *Ecclesiastical Essays* he has plainly expressed his opinion on the necessity for a revision in this department of theology.

It was in the midst of these “seven lean years” that the witness for the doctrine of St. John and Irenæus commenced in this place ; this pulpit was absolutely the only spot of church ground in London where the doctrine could be openly discussed.

From that time, however, (thirty years ago), began a succession of supporting testimonies, of which it is my delightful task now to trace the development.

In 1853, Mr. Horace Hastings, of Boston, published his *Pauline Theology*, in which he showed with admirable clearness that in the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles, there is no trace of the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, or a single expression which, taken in its obvious sense, teaches anything else than the doctrine of eternal life by the incarnation (Rom. viii., 1-14).

In 1855, Mr. John Sheppard, of Frome, the friend and biographer of the celebrated essayist Mr. John Foster, published anonymously his very learned and compact treatise on the *Duration of Evil*, in which that accomplished scholar (the author of the *Thoughts on Devotion*, and of another more learned work on the *Divine Origin of Christianity*) set forth the argument which convinced him of the truth of the re-awakening testimony.

In 1857 Professor Charles Hudson, of Boston (United States), the author of the most useful Concordance to the Greek Testament hitherto published, gave to the world his great work on *Debt and Grace as related to the Doctrine of a Future Life*. In this treatise, with a scholarship which places Mr. Hudson in the very front rank of American divines, the whole question of interpretation of the Scriptures on these topics is subjected to a searching investigation, and the general doctrine of Life in Christ vindicated with a learning which obtains the highest admiration from those whose special studies best enable them to appreciate it. This great writer has long since entered into rest. As long as he lived he honoured and encouraged us with his correspondence, and his name will become more famous in America whenever American scholars shall think fit to appreciate and re-publish his labours. His chief work has long been out of print.

In 1863, Dr. Leask, who had during the preceding twenty years become acquainted with the earlier writings on the subject, commenced the publication of the *Rainbow*, and a few years later, in 1868, opened its pages to the discussion of the question of immortality. In its earlier and later years it has been exceedingly useful in this direction. The kind-hearted editor has perhaps been too-easily persuaded to give the benefit of his pages of late to believers in the doctrine of

eternal life, who have somewhat damaged the argument by their advocacy of astronomical and ethnological theories which true science must sternly reject. Every good cause suffers from the additions of the weaker brethren who support it. Many of us, also, have frankly differed from the *Rainbow* in its too tolerant tone towards the doctrine, not merely of the *sleep* of the soul in death (which, so long as men believe in a surviving *sleeper*, should form no ground of serious separation between the upholders of the common faith), but also of the doctrine of the actual dissipation of the soul in death,—a theory rendering it impossible for ordinary minds to conceive of the personal identity of men in the Resurrection, or even to understand our Lord's words, “Fear not them that kill the body, *but are not able to kill the soul.*” (Matt. x., 28.) But, although absolutely by my own conscience compelled to make this single exception in reference to the *Rainbow*, considered as a representative magazine, it is far more necessary to record on this occasion the eminent and persistent service that Dr. Leask has rendered for many years and still renders, at great personal cost, and with conspicuous ability, to the object which is so dear to his heart.

In 1863, Mr. Henry Dunn published his two volumes on *The Destiny of the Human Race*. Mr. Dunn made no pretensions to be a critical scholar, and therefore sometimes stumbled; but he was something better than a mere verbal critic, he was a most broad-minded, honest, and devout thinker; above all a man who walked ever with God, whose house was a temple, and whose study-table was like the golden altar of incense. This, his principal work, is based on a fundamental denial of natural immortality, and on a fundamental belief in immortality through the Incarnation of God in Christ,—in whose eternal life he hoped, with Mr. Isaac Taylor, that multitudes of men would

be made sharers hereafter, who had enjoyed no opportunity of becoming sharers in it here. Mr. Dunn was not a Universalist, inasmuch as a few months before his death he intimated to me his general agreement with the argument for evangelisation of the race and its final issues, as stated in the later editions of *Life in Christ*. Mr. Henry Dunn's work on *The Study of the Bible* is a manual which deserves perpetual remembrance. I stood by this dear friend's open grave at Norwood a few years ago, and it is a grave which deserves a reverent pilgrimage from those who know how to revere a pioneer in the search for truth, one of the most princely-hearted and generous of mankind.

In 1864, the venerable Ami Bost, father of the celebrated philanthropist of La Force, published his pamphlet on the *Doom of the Wicked*, in which he expounded the Christian doctrine of Immortal Life in Christ.

In 1855, Professor Barlow, of Trinity College, Dublin, published his work on *Eternal Death*, in which he maintained the same views.

In the same year, Mr. Litton, of Dublin, a barrister, now one of the Irish Land Commissioners, published his excellent volume on *Life and Death*.

In 1866, the Rev. W. Ker, Vicar of Tipton, published his work on *Immortality in Christ*; followed by another in 1880, called *Immortality: Whence, and for Whom?*—perhaps the best shilling manual of introduction to the study of the question.*

In the same year, the Rev. Thomas Davis, M.A., revered throughout Yorkshire as Vicar of Roundhay, near Leeds, a ripe scholar and a charming poet, published his critical treatise on *Endless Sufferings not the doctrine of Scripture*, which has passed through several editions.

In 1867, Prebendary Constable appeared for the first time in the field. He published his great work on *Future Punishment*, one of the clearest, and I think most decisive, books in modern popular controversy. It has happily passed through several editions. Mr. Constable is now occupied in replying to Dr. Samuel Cox's *Salvator Mundi* in the pages of the *Rainbow*.

In 1868, the Rev. Samuel Minton, M.A., after holding in reserve during a very long period, for reasons assigned in his *Fragment of Autobiography*, the belief of Life in Christ, was at length so deeply impressed with the importance of the truth, that he avowed his belief to his congregation at Eaton Chapel, with the result of awakening a general discussion in the country, ten times more earnest and searching than we had been able to excite in the preceding twenty years. To this beloved and self-sacrificing clergyman, who abandoned all hope of promotion in order to advance the cause of his Master, is due, more than to any other individual, the first wide diffusion of these ideas throughout the English-speaking world; and it is chiefly to his sacrifices that subsequent writers owe the freedom with which they have been permitted in the Church of England to treat the whole question without serious loss of reputation.

In 1869, Mr. William Maude commenced those papers on Immortality, in the *Rainbow*, which, as long as they lasted, were the chief ornaments in scholarship of that periodical. To Mr. Maude is due no small share of the honour which belongs to the few disciplined scholars who took an early part in this discussion.

In 1870, Dr. Pétavel, of Geneva, read to a Theological Society, originated by Professor Godet, his argument entitled *The Struggle for Eternal Life*, since published with this title in English, with a preface by Dr. Dale of Birmingham, and in

French as *La Fin du Mal*. Dr. Emanuel Pétavel, formerly pastor of the Swiss Church in London, brought to the discussion the habits of a carefully-trained scholar, and the aid of no small erudition, both in classical and oriental tongues. In earlier years he had known England well, and had become conversant with the controversy there proceeding. God was thus preparing him to become the leading representative in the French-speaking countries of the revived doctrine of Immortal Life through the Incarnation—a doctrine which he is at this moment maintaining in the *Chrétien Evangelique* of Paris, against the misrepresentations of the younger Godet, with a learning, a logic, an energy, and a success, which have raised the admiration of impartial readers.

In connection with Dr. Pétavel's name it is proper to mention here, though it properly belongs to the year 1874, that of the Rev. Charles Byse, now of Brussels, then a Vaudois pastor, a man of extraordinary attainment in the classical languages, as well as in Hebrew and Arabic. He was brought in God's providence to spend a year in England, and through Dr. Pétavel he was brought to worship in this church. This seemingly accidental combination has borne fruit. Mr. Byse became a learned and able asserter of the doctrine on Eternal Life, and both of these foreign friends, being excellent English scholars, honoured us by devoting two years to translating *Life in Christ* into French (Mr. Byse translating, Dr. Pétavel assisting the revision); thus giving it currency amidst the vast population of France and Switzerland. Few English books have ever enjoyed the fortune of falling into the hands of more accomplished translators.

The result of their labours already begins to appear. The whole question of conditional life has been formally discussed in several important conferences of pastors in France

and Belgium ; with the effect of revealing, among not a few of the ablest of their number, a profound sympathy with the theology of Irenæus and St. John. In Paris, in Lyons, in Montauban, and in other places, there are vigorous supporters of the main argument. In Paris, Monsieur E. Ménègoz, Director of the Theological Faculty in the Protestant Seminary, has just published a book on *Sin and Redemption*, in which he declares S. Paul's faith in Life in Christ. In Montauban, the Pastor Choisy has courageously avowed his convictions in the same direction. In Geneva, Monsieur Cæsar Malan, one of the foremost thinkers in Switzerland, and Mademoiselle Gaußen, the able daughter of a learned father, are warmly devoted to the same doctrine.

In 1870, Mr. Pettingell, Chaplain of the American Embassy in Brussels, prepared a work, called *the Theological Trilemma ; or, the Three Theories on Human Destiny considered in the light of Reason and Revelation*. Mr. Pettingell has now returned to America, and is at this time bringing out a considerable volume in support of the main thesis ; which will also contain a *Symposium*, or series of contributions made by American and English writers on the bearings of this doctrine. Mr. Pettingell has the ear of a wide circle in the United States, and we trust that he will succeed in making it clear throughout the United States that the doctrine of the immortality of the children of God only is not a "passing fanaticism" (as Dr. Dexter lately declared it to be in the *Congregationalist* newspaper), but a belief deeply rooted in the convictions of scholars as profound, and of Christians as devoted, as any who entertain the conviction that evil is eternal. It is too late for language like that of the *Congregationalist* to arrest the controversy in America. Dr. Dorner, of Berlin, has spoken of the mode of discussion adopted in at least one of its representative books, in a letter to the translators, as being "thoroughly

scientific," and it must be a strange "fanaticism" which attaches so vast a company of devout and accomplished adherents and proclaimers in all lands.

In 1870, the Rev. John Denniston, M.A., a learned Baptist minister, brought out his work on the *Perishing Soul*, which has reached a second edition. The calm and scholar-like tone of Mr. Denniston has been the means of convincing no small company of discerning readers. He now lives in Jamaica, where, doubtless, he still holds up the light of truth in that thickly-peopled centre of the West Indian Archipelago.

In 1870, also, appeared the work of the Rev. William Griffith, of Eastbourne, called the *Entire Evidence of Evangelists and Apostles on Future Punishment, with Notes on the Teaching of Dr. Angus*. This work is now approaching a second and much-enlarged edition, and contains a chapter called *Immortal Life the Golden Thread of St. John's Gospel*, which will, doubtless, attract attentive readers.

In 1870, also, appeared Professor Birks' work on the *Victory of Divine Goodness*, interesting chiefly as an evidence that the ceaseless fire of argument was beginning to tell even upon the strongholds of orthodoxy at Cambridge. But the extent of Mr. Birks' concession was only to throw out the extraordinary idea that God would perhaps create an inferior paradise in Gehenna for the solace of the eternally damned. Naturally such a theory gained few converts.

In 1873, Mr. Dale, of Birmingham, after preaching the doctrine of Life in Christ for some years in his own congregation, avowed more publicly his conviction of its truth in a meeting of the Congregational Union. Thrice he has repeated his adhesion—1, in a preface to the English translation of Dr. Pétavel's work in 1875; 2, in an article in 1876 in the *Congregational Magazine*, of which he was editor; and 3,

at a meeting held in this church in the year 1877. The influence of Mr. Dale's confession of faith throughout the country has been very considerable, multitudes of preachers having taken courage at least to commence an inquiry into the doctrine set forth, whom no inferior authority, or *prima facie* appearance of evidence, would have persuaded to the investigation.

About this time, when the tide had begun to turn rapidly in favour of the more simple interpretation of Scripture language on life and death, the opponents, of various schools, began to consider of resistance. In 1875, Mr. Baldwin Brown published his lectures on what he called the Miserable Doctrine of Annihilation, regarded in the light of the Gospel of Love, in which the matter was set forth in such a manner as to persuade me that a re-statement of the whole controversy had become necessary. This, therefore, led to the publication at the end of 1875 of an entirely new work, to which I attached the old title of *Life in Christ*, the growth at least of a lifetime of study.*

This publication was the signal for a renewed interest in the discussion. In 1876, occurred the Meeting at Cannon Street Hotel, of the leading advocates of the revived belief in Conditional Life, specially of those who thought it of unspeakable importance in relation to Foreign Missions. Through the liberality of one gentleman, an edition of 50,000 copies of the addresses then delivered by Mr. Constable, Mr. Heard, Dr. Leask, and others, was widely distributed by post, at large expense—a copy being specially sent to every English-speaking missionary on earth, whose name could be ascertained—a measure which is rightly believed to have commenced the

* Now published in a cheap third revised edition, 550 pp. 8vo., by Mr. Stock, 62, Paternoster Row, who sells the works here mentioned.

modification of the thoughts of a multitude of missionaries in all heathen lands.

During the years from 1870 up to 1876, the cause received important aid from a variety of careful writers in magazines and pamphlets—notably from the Rev. T. W. Hobson, M.A., of Douglas, in his crushing reply to Garbett; from Mr. James Waylen, an artist, a scholar, and a theologian; from the Rev. Thos. Warleigh, rector of Ashchurch; from Dr. Weymouth, head-master of Mill Hill, (who expressed in one pregnant sentence his impression as to the meaning of the leading Greek terms employed in the New Testament in declaring the destiny of mankind*) and from the Rev. J. B. Tinling, B.A., of Eastbourne, a man whose wide experience in Home Missions added special weight to the argument of his book on the *Promise of Life*.

In 1878, Canon Farrar preached those sermons on *Eternal Hope*, in Westminster Abbey, which shook the whole country with astonishment, and woke into inquiry innumerable slumbering divines who had dreamed on contentedly on the edge of what they professed to believe was a hell of endless torment for unsaved mankind. Dr. Farrar's point of view was the practical incredibility of the orthodox faith as it stood. As head-master of Marlborough, he had met with much occasion for thought on the religious character of boys, and on the eternal destiny of boys dying at fourteen to fifteen years of age, with good general dispositions but no developed godliness. Had these poor fellows really gone to everlasting torments under the

* "My mind fails to conceive a grosser misinterpretation of language than when the five or six strongest words which the Greek tongue possesses, signifying *destroy* or *destruction*, are explained to mean maintaining an everlasting but wretched existence. To translate white as black is nothing to this."

government of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ? Accordingly, taking just advantage of a public feeling prepared and excited by the labours of previous writers, he openly attacked the prevailing opinion with a directness and passionateness of assault, which, if it added little to the argument, certainly shook the foundation of established errors in the higher classes of society.

The publication of Dr. Farrar's sermons showed that he had, with the reactionary tendency of oratorical genius, gone almost to the opposite extreme of Universalism. This dogmatic position Dr. Farrar indeed repudiates in his later work on *Judgment and Mercy*, in reply to Dr. Pusey's book, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?*—and this later work of Canon Farrar is a far weightier production than the former. It gives the most complete view as yet published of Jewish Rabbinical opinions on human destiny; and makes it clearer than ever that the doctrine of endless misery was not the orthodox faith of Christ's contemporaries. It is a storehouse of facts on the question of authority in this department. But Canon Farrar offers little aid in the interpretation of Scripture. He admits most candidly that if the old-fashioned established laws of interpretation must prevail, "no demolition can be so complete, and so logical, as that which Mr. White and Mr. Minton have inflicted on the arguments hitherto brought against them by those who think that these questions require nothing for their decision but the shuffling and manipulation of a few phrases or texts." This is the language in which the late head-master of Marlborough describes the established laws of biblical and classical interpretation. He seems to rely, with Mr. Andrew Jukes and Dr. Samuel Cox, on some more sublime mode of extracting truth from the Bible than the old method of ascertaining the meaning

of its ordinary expressions. It reminds us of Hooker's words, that "there is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and delusive art which changeth the meaning of words as alchemy doth, or would do, the substance of metals, making of anything what it listeth, and *bringing in the end all truth to nothing.*" It is by the operation of this new alchemy on Scripture terms that we are taught that the threatened destruction of a sinner really signifies the *destruction of sin* in him, a statement in which all three of these eminent writers agree, denouncing the more obvious sense as a piece of debasing literalism. Mr. Constable, who has a special gift in following up the deceptive windings of Universalism, well points out that according to this definition of destruction, by Messrs. Farrar, Jukes, and Cox, the "destruction" of a sinner is precisely the same thing with the "salvation" of a sinner; so that it might be said with equal truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy sinners, and to save them. But indeed it seems hopeless to ascertain and fix the exegetical principles of Universalism. Whenever the Scripture offers language which seems to stand like a wall straight across the pathway of this theory, it is unceremoniously levelled with the ground. As for any painstaking study of the positive doctrine of Life in Christ, or any detailed reply to its arguments, such a process is not to be found in its recent publications. Scorn for literalism, and the bold assertion of the figurative sense of all Scripture language on human destiny, make up the sum of its criticism, so far as I am able to understand it. The question is—Whose word shall stand? God's word, or theirs?

I am sorry to speak thus disparagingly of the works of men at whose feet, in other respects, I should gladly sit as a learner,—men of noble aims and lofty thought. But indeed I am supported by still abler men in affirming that the tone of

the Bible as a whole, in its tremendous warnings of the wrath to come, is much nearer to the tone of the "orthodox" faith than it is to the cheerful temper of Universalist writers in their encouragement to obstinate sinners. They hold out to such indeed a certain degree of penalty, but beyond the penalty shines the "eternal hope" of universal salvation; and this is the issue which sinners regard. Now, Christ and His Apostles speak of "everlasting destruction" of such, and of an "indignation and wrath" which reaches to the "destruction of body and soul in hell." I feel as unable as I did thirty years ago to believe that these words contain a single ray of hope for those wicked men in whose experience they will be fulfilled.

It is one thing to hold, as many do, that God's great mercy may permit of the presentation of saving truth and grace to men in a future state, who, from age or circumstances, have had no opportunity of laying hold of eternal life here; it is quite another thing to hold and teach that the wicked men who have seen and rejected the Light of the world shall not "perish in their iniquity." This seems to be flying in the face of the Incarnate Judge, who has declared that their "destruction" shall be "eternal."

Now, lastly, I wish to add a few words on the extent to which this mass of printed argument, in support of what we think divine truth, has influenced Christian opinion.

There is a certain difficulty in forming an estimate, because on this subject there prevails a strong tendency in many quarters to conceal the facts. No sooner does any considerable man reach the conclusion that divine truth is to be found in the direction of the doctrine of Life in Christ, than his friends begin to consider how they can persuade him to

conceal his new convictions. Although he may be satisfied in his own mind of the general validity of the argument, he is conjured to nurse every remaining doubt, so as to lessen the obligation which conscience imposes on him to declare himself, on a question where the character of Almighty God is so deeply concerned. Thus some even of the ablest and most successful preachers of this generation, blest by God in awakening many souls, men who know their bibles as few do, will deliberately tell you that they find not a vestige of evidence in the New Testament, from the beginning of the gospel of St. Matthew to the end of St. Jude's epistle,—that is in the Four Gospels, and in all the Apostolic Epistles—for the natural immortality of the soul, or for any other doctrine than that of Life in Christ; yet, who because they think this avowal in public would injure their usefulness, nurse some doubt which they have as to the meaning of one passage at the end of the Apocalypse. Imagine a good man acting thus in relation to any other gospel doctrine! Would he not boldly teach, on any other topic, what he thought the four Evangelists and the four great Apostles SS. James, Peter, John, and Paul, lay down as dogmatic truth?

A new illustration has just occurred of the concealment of beliefs in the case of Dr. Alexander Vinet, of Lausanne. Vinet died in 1850. No one dreamed of heresy in connection with Vinet's name. No, he was the modern Pascal, the great pillar of French Protestant orthodoxy. Yet it now appears by the publication in his correspondence of a letter written in 1845, and suppressed for nearly forty years by his orthodox friends, that M. Vinet disbelieved in the popular doctrine of the necessary immortality of souls, and rested all his solid hope of an eternal life for man in the revelation of God in Christ, declaring plainly for the everlasting destruction of the wicked.

Thus it is with many others, both lay and cleric. The Boards of Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, Bible Societies, are honeycombed with these beliefs, but the fear of denunciation by a few fanatical members restrains confession. Mr. Impey, before referred to, assures me that the Wesleyan ministry is in a similar condition ; but the secret doubters and believers are restrained by fear of losing their official position as Ministers, if they should openly declare what they think concerning the character and ways of God as set forth in the Methodist formularies. I say these things with full assurance of their truth.

Nevertheless, the confession of this faith is now rapidly extending. Prominent men who hold it ought to confess it to encourage others. The pressure of popular Atheism increasing among the scientific and operative classes, and founded nearly altogether upon abhorrence of the dogma of eternal torments, is leading numbers to perceive that Christianity, in order to weather the storm that is breaking upon it, must become more Scriptural in its basis. Christianity with the idea of Immortal Life at the centre, can successfully meet every Infidelity, every Atheism, every Paganism ; and the positively large company of men who have proved this by experience are sensibly influencing the understandings of mankind.

In the Mission field the stirring of the dry bones of the ancient theology is well nigh universal. Young men who go forth from Europe saturated with modern knowledge, and are placed face to face with hundreds of millions of heathens in India and China, are finding that they cannot retain or preach the ancient and horrible dogma of the endless misery of so many pagans ; and it becomes an urgent question with them between Universalism and the New Testament doctrine

of Life Eternal in Christ alone. If at home the current is still running strongly among the multitudes who do not sufficiently "tremble at the word of the Lord" in favour of Universalism, in the mission field it is running with equal strength in favour of the doctrine which has so long been expounded here and elsewhere.

Time would fail me to tell what I know of the doubts of students now preparing for mission work; of the faith of missionaries abroad, and of Christian laymen in foreign parts. One noble worker, a Baptist missionary, Mr. Hobbs, of Sewry, in Bengal, in 1870, at home on furlough after ten years labour, in passing up Fleet Street, sees an advertisement of "Three Letters on Life in Christ," then appearing in the *Christian World*. Mr. Hobbs buys a copy, reads, goes home, and goes back to India, to study the matter for several years, is deeply convinced, avows his conviction to the Baptist Missionary Committee. On returning home, invalided, a second time, in 1878, he gradually and quietly drops out of missionary employment, and is consigned to an obscure post as a home worker in Bedfordshire; thence he is drawn out again by a wonderful providence to an independent mission work in Calcutta; commences evangelical labour in open confession of the doctrine of Life through the Incarnation; conciliates all Christian hearts by his temper and prudence; is supplied with the means of maintaining native fellow-workers—all of them earnest believers in the same doctrine; circulates Christian literature; writes catechisms and tracts on a Scriptural basis—all his brethren encouraging him—just because the hand of God is evidently with this honest and devoted man.

Another example:—The chief jailer of Bangalore is travelling, twenty years ago, on a hot day in India—reposes in the rest-house—finds on a window sill one ant-eaten page of a

tract on Life only in Christ—reads it, searches the Scriptures, believes it—forms a lending library of the books and pamphlets which set forth the argument. A young Wesleyan missionary, forced by the overpowering burden of Conference theology to think over his creed among the Indian millions, is led similarly to this conclusion, and before he returns home by command, to resign his office, he discovers that through the circulation of books from the pious jailer's library, there was not a European Christian in a populous cantonment near Bangalore, who had not embraced the belief of Life in Christ. It is in fact travelling through India with almost electric energy.

Mr. Skrefsrød, in Santhalistan, whose immense linguistic knowledge gives additional authority to his words, as an interpreter of the Asiatic Bible, openly avows his coincident belief in this doctrine of Eternal Life through the Immortal Saviour, and his boldness on those mountains will encourage very many.

In China a solid foundation has been laid in Hankow, by the courageous and able London missionaries, Mr. Griffith John and Mr. Evan Bryant. During the past ten years they have cleared out from the hymn-books and catechisms all unscriptural phrases on human destiny. Mr. Bryant has openly taught for ten years what he believes to be the revelation of God on Life Eternal, and his words will not fall to the ground. For such is the nature of this truth that sometimes one single hint or sentence of direction sets whole companies of people reading their Bibles in a fresh light, and when that process begins, especially accompanied by earnest prayer, it is seldom long before some of the readers see as in plain daylight that the Bible was not written to teach man's natural immortality or the everlasting torments of lost souls. In truth, future punishment does not occupy in the Bible nearly the prominent position that it occupies in mediæval and modern theology. The

chief topic of the Bible is Salvation by Love—the only Gospel which reaches lost souls; and as for those who “choose death,” and “*judge themselves unworthy of eternal life*,” they are with few words abandoned by the Apostles to the awful doom of the death eternal. All menaces, all arguments, all sensational alarms would be wasted upon unbelievers; and therefore the Bible is comparatively silent.

Lastly, Christianity in Japan is waking up to behold the same glorious light of truth rising with healing on its wings. Several of the American and European missionaries in the Japanese Empire have embraced these views of Divine Truth.

The Rev. Walter Dening, in Hakodati, is probably the ablest Church missionary in that distant post. Formerly in Madagascar, he has now been ten years in Japan. He is a learned scholar, and translates into Japanese such works as “Mozley on Miracles,” yet has equal facilities in the colloquial dialect, so that he commands attention from large congregations of the common people. Mr. Dening, face to face with Japanese Buddhism and Atheism, has found the weakness of the traditional faith, which sets forth a God, at whose moral character those ingenious, thoughtful Japanese smile with incredulity, or sneer with contempt—a God who will create countless immortals in danger of endless misery, yet leave them in the dark for thousands of years, without allowing them to hear one word of the only remedy.

Mr. Dening was compelled to re-examine his creed. He sent home for the books which in England are setting forth the doctrine of Universalism, by Canon Farrar, Dr. Cox, and Mr. Jukes, and he sent also for other books on Life in Christ only. He has embraced with ardour the latter belief. He is recalled by his Directors, to give an account of his defection from their standard; though the Prayer Book does not contain one single word requiring belief in the Immortality of the soul,

or in endless torments. We await the result of their deliberations. If Mr. Dening is recalled because he will not preach endless torments to the Japanese, or natural immortality to the Buddhists, all England will hear of it, and England will, I am confident, blame, not Mr. Dening, but any Committee, however venerable, which should insist on missionary articles of belief, which are not articles of the Church of England.

But enough. I have told you now a story, my brethren, which is true, I believe, in every syllable, and it is as wonderful as it is true. In presence of such facts all personal recollections sink into insignificance. For ourselves we say to-day only this:—thank God that it was allotted to us to take part in the latest revival of such a truth; a truth which brings joy and gladness wherever it shines forth; brings intenser faith and more personal love to Christ, who “saves our *lives* with a great deliverance;” more unbroken confidence in God, whose justice and mercy have alike become more intelligible; brings more solid conviction of the truth of the Gospel as the only light of life beyond, and gilds the tomb itself with the radiance of the blessed hope of resurrection. But here let these personal references end. The progress of great truths is hindered by all self-regard. Let us lose the thought of past disrepute in public rejoicing. The battle is half-won. It has been won by many soldiers of Christ, by steady prayer, by steady suffering, by steady witnessing, by ceaseless Scriptural reply to the adversaries of the truth, who are now mostly weary of the conflict. As for ourselves, God will deal with us as he thinks good. As for the doctrine of Life in Christ, it is rooted in sound criticism of the Word of God, it is rooted in antiquity, it is rooted in myriads of able minds and earnest hearts, and it is certain to triumph.

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